Oregon cities recognize Indigenous Peoples' Day

By Dean Rhodes
Smoke Signals editor

Two of the largest cities in Oregon – Portland and Corvallis – have officially named the second Monday in October as Indigenous Peoples' Day instead of Columbus Day.

On Wednesday, Oct. 7, the Portland City Council unanimously adopted a resolution recognizing Indigenous Peoples' Day and on Monday, Oct. 12, Corvallis Mayor Biff Traber signed a proclamation at the Native American Longhouse Eena Haws at Oregon State University formally recognizing Indigenous Peoples' Day.

Columbus Day, marking the arrival of Italian explorer Christopher Columbus in the Americas in 1492, became a federal holiday in 1937 even though the day had been unofficially honored for many years beforehand. However, Oregon remained one of four states, including Hawaii, Alaska and South Dakota, that did not officially recognize the day.

Columbus' arrival in the Americas is now widely viewed as the beginning of the subjugation of Native peoples in both South and North America and started the settlement of the Americas by Europeans, which proved disastrous for Native populations across the two continents.

The city of Berkeley, Calif., replaced Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples' Day in 1992, a move that was followed by Sebastopol and Santa Cruz, Calif. Other U.S. cities that have changed the day from honoring Columbus to Native peoples include Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minn., and Seattle, Wash.

Portland's resolution recognizes that the city was built upon the homelands, villages and traditional use areas of the Multnomah and Clackamas Chinook and says the city "has a responsibility to oppose the systematic racism toward indigenous peoples of the United States, which perpetuates high rates of poverty and income inequality, exacerbating disproportionate health, education and social crises."

"This is a great day for Portland and a great day for our indigenous citizens," said Portland Mayor Charlie Hales. "This is an idea that has come forward out of the community and been brought to this council for action.

"When you think about it, we really don't have power over history, but history has some power over us. History shapes the water course that our lives are moved in. I think there are some things we can do in light of that history. We can remember, we can repair and we can respect."

Hales said that Portland has the ninth largest urban Native American population in the United States and those residents are descended from more than 200 Tribes.

"The history of our indigenous community is woven into the fabric of the city," Hales said.

Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno was accompanied by Tribal Council members Denise Harvey and Jon A. George and Tribal Council Secretary Cheryle A. Kennedy at the City Council meeting.

"It's a real honor to be here today," Leno said. "I think this proclamation is really a first step forward. We took great honor in the using of our language for the naming of Tilikum Crossing. That day of escorting the train across the bridge for the first time was historic for us."

Leno said the Grand Ronde Tribe signed the Willamette Valley Treaty of 1855 that ceded all of the land that is now Portland to the federal government.

"Our relation with Portland is not just with the city, but to the ground," Leno said. "Our connection to Portland is with the land. You can pour a lot of concrete, pour a lot of blacktop and lay down a lot of gravel, but it does not change for us that when we come here we are walking in the footsteps of our ancestors. That is really important to us, so to have you acknowledge that by naming this day is very great. … This is a very historic and moving day. This is a first step forward and we just need to keep going in a positive direction."

Kennedy said the day represents a change in people's hearts.

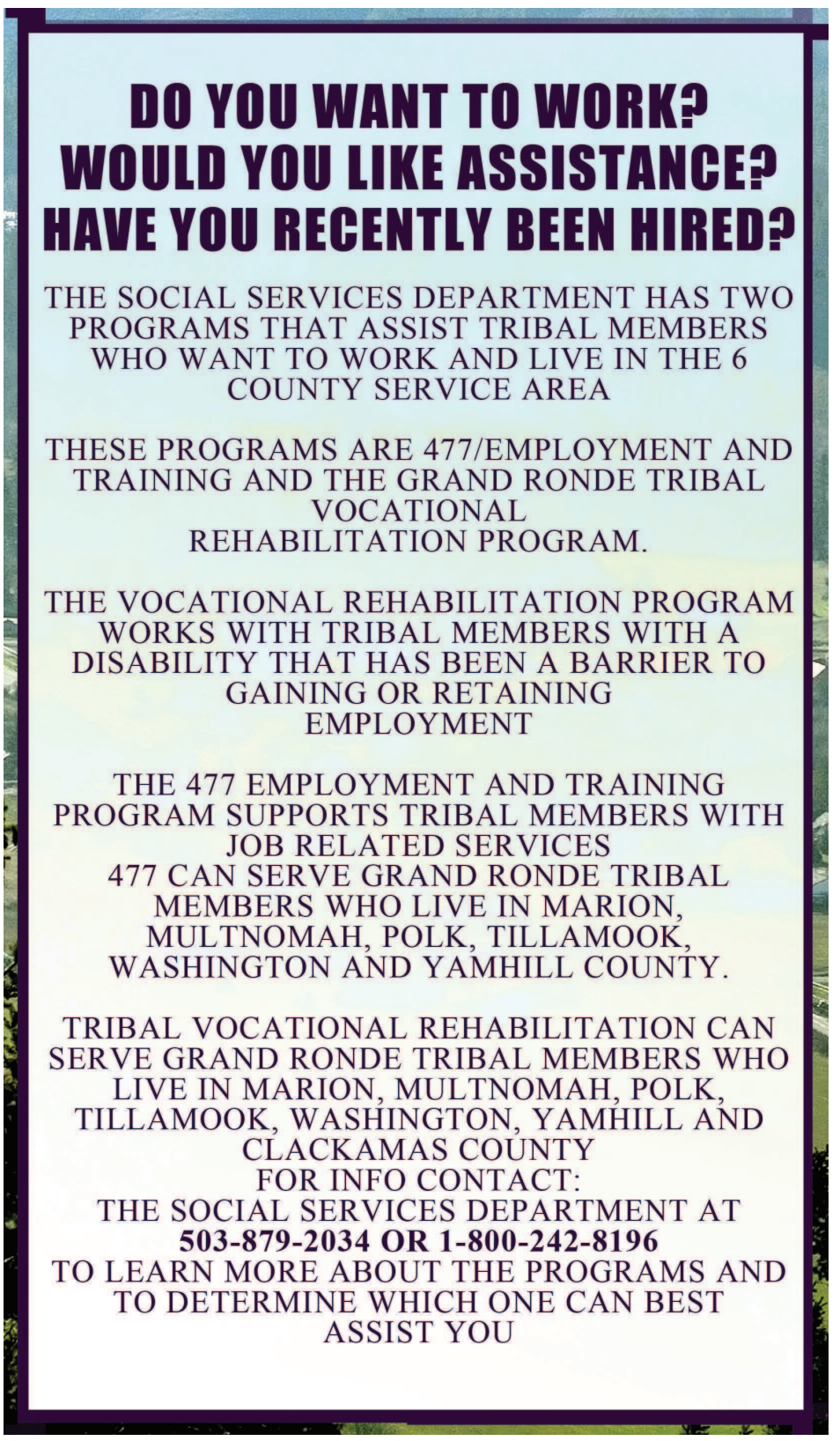
"When people put their hearts and minds together, change can happen," Kennedy said. "I really appreciate that that is what is happening today."

"We really appreciate this opportunity and honor that you are bestowing upon Native peoples," George said. "We are the ancestors of the people of this area. What an honor it is that you recognize the Natives of this area."

Grand Ronde Tribal leaders gifted a Michelle Alaimo photograph of the Grand Ronde Honor Guard crossing Tilikum Crossing Bridge during the Sept. 12 grand opening celebration, as well as Tribal necklaces, to the Portland City Council.

Also attending the event were Tribal Council Chief of Staff Stacia Martin and Tribal Attorney Rob Greene, as well as members of the Klamath, Warm Springs, Squaxin Island and Nez Perce Tribes, among others.

On Thursday, Oct. 8, Tribal Council approved a resolution recognizing Indigenous Peoples' Day as the second Monday in October and as a Tribal holiday beginning this year. ■



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Health Center adds hours

SALEM — Chemawa Indian Health Center, 3750 Chemawa Road N.E., will now be open for business on Wednesday afternoons. Wednesday hours will be 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. to allow for morning administrative meetings. Other hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. For more information, call 503-304-7600 or 800-452-7623. ■

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